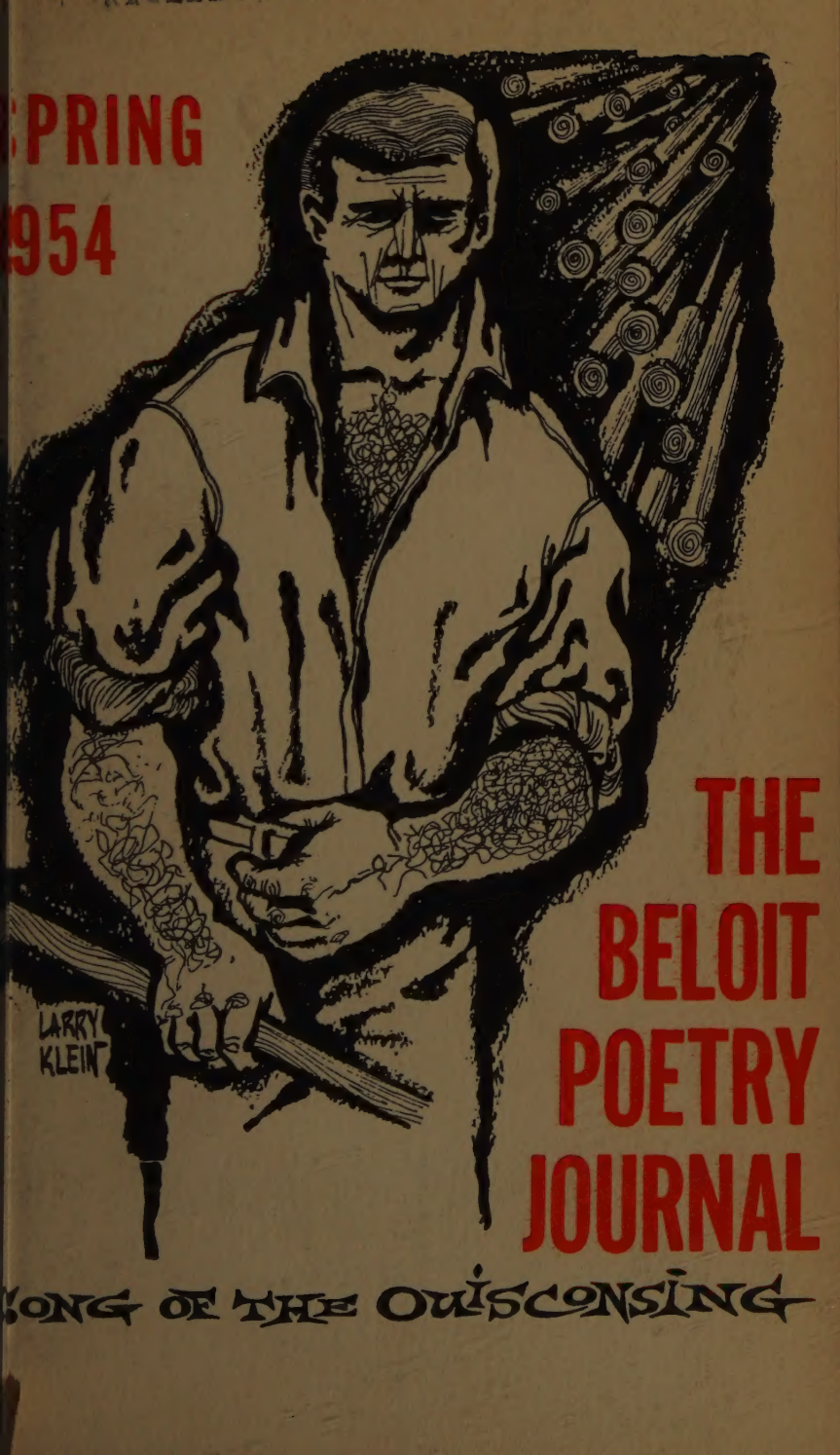
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THE
BELOIT
POETRY
JOURNAL
ONG OF THE OUISCONSING

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SPECIAL NOTICE

On the following 21 pages, we present an excerpt—one entire section—from a long, autobiographical poem by George Vukelich entitled **Memoirs of a Young Man.** Though it is generally not the policy of this magazine to present only part of a work, we feel that this excerpt is capable of being judged as an independent entity, however much it may be an integral part of a larger whole.

The Editors

SONG OF THE OUISCONSING

the sounds of the strongnames range over this land
like the winds

Oconto Oneida Oconomowoc

these are the moccasin words: moving like duckdeer into
the big marshes: the silent and the speechless and the
instincts of the snowcap country are heritage here
you must keep downwind
the shadows holding their heads high and flowing
in rivers through the bottomlands
shifting from bank to bank they go quietly
as the sandbars

you must listen hard for certain splashings or wholeherds
will slip past you and be lost in mudtangles of muskeg
and tamarack

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Lac du Flambeau

Lac Vieux Desert

Manitowish

these branches breaking: the brushings
the musk of skunk to the highheads
they will bolt the flatcreekbeds in longleaps
you must standstill as the trees
and be listening

Manitowoc

Minocqua

Matengo

the bullmoose with the bodies like boulders
they left this land in the swishing of summerwind
they crossed on into Canada with scarcely a sound

Manawa Ojibwa Chippewa

the untamed words: the bigwild words moving through
these woods like the whitetail deer:

the courer de bois came hurrying here from the upnorth
land the singingmen: with the chanson of home on the
Indiancarrys the paddled west to the Grand Portage
from the freight canoes: the small lands offshore
all looked to be like St. Marie
the Frenchmen driving deeply into the sun and squinting
their eyes at Manitou

The bigland is off to the left, bebe:
Ouisconsing waits for our bodies like a sleeping woman

they shouldered into the paddles and drove past the

3

Apostles: the last of the Great Lakes clawing at the
fat gunwhales and it could not cling: the foam track
falling behind there is nothing that can run with the
Canadian

only bubbles on the empty lake surface going the
otherway long long after the voyageur had gained
Siskowit Bay for a dinnermeal, bebe, and a potfire
cookingup the new coffee down on the beach:

the one who is called Viggo looks into the wind
he sleeps and there are the women from Ouisconsing

the river St. Croix runs the sunset shore of Ouisconsing:
there is council held with its brother on the lean
beaches:

Chicog Totogatic
and
Namekagon of the clan of rivers

the blood of the watertribe is intermingled:
common spring veins are lanced to reveal the line of
Ouisconsing: from the seed: the strong sons hunt
with the eagle heart of the father:

St. Croix leads the hunters southward

others of the same blood track out of the home country
and stand in the shoreflats
awaiting their brother: the hunt is downstream

Yellow

Clam

and the one called Squaw

4

their clans can be traced like loosened bow strips
to Chequamegon

Marengo

Tomahawk

Brule

Ontonagon

Eau Claire

and Wapogasset: brave warrior chiefs who pushed a

wild country back into the Great Lakes

at a sharp bend in the stream bend:
the hunters are met by a young bear muscled warrior from
the West: his strength is greater even then the arms
of the crying St. Croix: St. Croix falls:
he will lead them now and it will be a warparty to the
south: his broodhardened back throws them down in turn
when they fight for St. Croix as leader
his name he tells them in a tone that should be used
only in talking to squaws about stone pounding the
cornmeal: his name is

Mississippi

I am the people of a proud land:
I am the spirit of a tallpine state that started in
1848 and considerably before

I am the words from the quiet firwoods of the slow
north country

I am the Indian words that stood spreadlegged on the
wickiup shores of Lake Superior: guarding the land of the

Grand Portage

I am the Frenchman's furtrapper words: the courer de bois carrying in the crucifixes of Pere Marquette to the medicine men:

I am the whitewater words from all the veinways of the Great Lakes Drainage Basin pumping like blood through this ground:

I am the rawhide words of the packrat lumber robbers stealing out the big woods and the little people and leaving only the stumps:

I am the words of the railroads laying down the law and the rightofways along the waterways and dynamiting the dams of beavers:

I am the words of the lografts and the logrivers and of the manbreed as strong as axehandles:

I am the words of the Winnebago watching the white man harnessing the hunting grounds to the plough horses:

I am the words of the Sioux watching the crawlings of snakefences:

I am the words of stormwaters swept hard into the fishermen's beach

I am the words of pioneers

I am the words of a people called: Wisconsin

I have left the woods and come away from them and yet these words are of the woods and the people of the tall pines: the bonehandle breed of men

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brash: with the big wrists and the legs like cedar
roots cutting down a country in the clear mornings:
riding a millionfeet of logmiles to the millponds
riding the horsewhip currents of the Wisconsin and
the Chippewa in the cold mornings before the big
freezeup:

stream bends: braced and balanced in the midcurrents:
the men are faraway in the mists of riverstream:
their voices ring like axebites across the channel
mouths from shore: you can see them clearing the

marking the miles by the shorescud and endless tobacco
chews: they are bearded and anklebooted: rivermen
without riverboats running the waters like driftwood:
downhill to the big mills

It may be that they are anxious for the shore towns
and the cleanshaves: the bar whiskey from new bottles
and the warm legs of the norski girls:

it goes lonely with the lografts:
there is the drift of dreams down these wooden rivers:
an empire is on the way here:

the riverways are trafficked with the legions of
Rome: the spoils outpour from the slaveland like
the wealth of Carthage:

Alexander stands on the booms of white pine and cries
for the unconquered worlds.

the water is all woodentopped: it is a rooftop nailed
tight from shore to shore in the narrows:

the front logs jam: the boom piles up behind: the pilot

yells for the pikes and all the men go skipping to the
stuck logs and slam at them with the hooks: the trouble
is a sandbar: shallowlying and ugly:
the leadlogs are nosed in solidly with the boom hung
up the bigsticks grind against each other like animals
caught in a stuffedup slaughter chute: the pikepoles
are useless: the pilot comes up fast: there is deep
water beyond the sandbar: a few feet further and the
channel is free again: but the boom will not budge:

the pressure bangs the bark from the locked in logs:
the pilot shouts for dynamite: certain men make for
the rafthouse and come forward carrying fuses: they
are fixed at the front above the sandbar: the pilot is
the last man to run

there is a moment for running and the wind and the
silent shore: and then the bar flows straight up
in the sky: the geyserstream is dirty with sand and mud
and the slabs of exploded wood
the logboom slides forward like a ship from drydock
the bow is blasted out but it will be seaworthy nonetheless
the channel will be deep enough from here the rest of the
way: and it will take awhile for the sand to pile up
in the mainstream again

this will be a cooperative river until then

the pilot goes back to watching the fresh coffee cooking:
keeping one eye on the hunched up shoulders of the
balanced pike men picking at the loosened logs where
the front blew out

a few small dead perch bob up in front of the logs
and are held there as the current catches the boom
once more.

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I will walk slowly from this place
my steppings are part of a masterplan, I think
and have been measured out for me much before me

anwyay: it is better to be on the move and not hanging
like beefsides in the cold lockers

I should like to stay and scan the silage skies in
the spring mornings

there will be signs of summer: grazing on the fringes
and munching in green grasses like the milch cows
Winter is a badtime in the pasturelands: the frost
drives deeply: the dirt is hardpan

Summer stands in a steel stanchion with its head
locked in at a dented feed bucket dreaming cow ·
dreams in the month of December

I should like to leave for the Florida keys and
count the days like conch shells and not come back at
all even when the homefarm is green again and the snows
are running like barnrats back through the deepcut culverts

I must walk slowly in this place
my boats are stiff in this season
I pass the nailed up pump in back of the sunporch and
stamp out my feet

Christmas has come and it has left:
a new feed bucket
Also: many many conch shells:

and some coral bits and pieces

the woman is a stranger on this shore
she must walk softly in alien sand
is the wind a woman do you suppose

my husband walked here with rolled down boots
in the fouroclock dawns, he went down to the
fishboats: he carried fishing gear and oilskin
slickers: he walked with his brothers side along
side

the mornings lay moored to the rivermouth
the wooden fish boxes were put aboard
the lines were loosened from the bow
my husband took his place in the right pilothouse
the gas engine awoke with the cold morning hack

I used to watch them leave this shore
I used to walk the wet beachsand after they
were pointed outward for the fishgrounds
and the fencelike spiles poking up like strings
of matchsticks a mile out

he has left this shore

he has not left his son

this is empty beach hereabouts: clear back to the dunes

I shall stand upon the stairs
I shall reach out for one star
the moon will fit into my hand: it is no larger
then a bird heart. It is true my hands are wings
these things are familiar with the high winds and I
will burst free like a quail from weeds

the hawks will drop to hunt you down

they come hard hunting and hungry at dawn

I shall sweep above their wings
I shall go steeply into the high winds
I shall be beyond them

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I shall be beyond time

at first: the being alone will be like a tomb
my hands will become familiar to me again:
after a waiting

and the hawks

an old tincan and nothing more
breaks up the flow of flattened shore
the current comes cold against this sand
the current comes crawling without a sound

the boat gear shack drops its paint like leaves
the winter is harsh with paint and fisherman's laughs
the blackrats stumble forward to feed
in the stubblewhite of summer field
they squat sucking in the bare birch groves
their mouths are cold with the mould of graves

June and July lie buried here
August too and the sandflies hum
they are not beyond the reach of rats
they fill the beachlands with their rot
they are trapped: they crippled fast
the rats will reach them first

a summer man once searched these dunes
a fly once crawled cathedral domes
the water watched and washed in crosswood
the duckgrass stood dumb in the wind

the summer storm formed up in the west
August scuttered for its life in behind
the seawall

In another summer:

11

this will be a clean and flowflat shore
the old turtles will sleep:
and the sandworms will bore

today is the burning of the brush
the summer debris where the rabbits bunch
the gasoline is spilled on the sticks of snow
the fire catches with a cry: it is a scavenger
nosing the dead things

there is a stench of September here also
suicide leaves floating like ash from the soft
wood trees: the big pines stand proud and not abandoned
the poplars are cleanstripped: all like crosses
the wind watches the dumb woodpeckers on Calvary
the flames climb like crows
two rabbits explode from the far side and crowd back
into the ground under another pile
they are quick like shotgun blasts
the snows have made them stringy: and fast

also: the deer at this time of year are bagbellied
and thinly: high snows will moor them to the marshes
and the cedar swamps
the starvations will hunt them hard like high
powered rifles: and the wolves

the flames bite back into the snow
water runs upon this ground and cannot enter
a little bit of spring is seen
Summer is foetus in this sun

the ground is charred stuff and hot from this burning
this is a strange and hostile season
the sky is clear: and yet reveals nothing

this fire will die out

12

and tonight the weasels will come crossing
the snowshoe trail from the cabin
and they will poke in the ashes of ice cold
pine branches:

and old rabbit houses

there is a loghouse by the lake
its ribs are stoved and it is lank
the winds breach the windows and the walls
the dam is pressurebusted by hammering heads
of winter: it is deathveined like concrete
in the teeth of raw water

Once: it was more
yet: it is mine

the fieldmice nest down the stove
the floursack is hard like stone
the noises of summer are all stilled
the fireplace is full of silences
this emptiness is in me like stiletto
like a fishhead nailed to a beam
I shiver my arms and watch my breath

I would like to bake five loaves of bread
if the stove still served
and I still starved

this menu must be stark
there is no hunger after dark in me
and yet there was more
and it was mine

You are only a mile from her now

she sleeps a mile from here in the snow

the lake is silent with her sleep

you will be able to see her from here

when spring comes:

and the crows

the graves of grandfathers dug into these
Wisconsin woods: the bloodlines of the
fishermen's boys stretch like purse seines
to the Frenchman's shores:

the sun of Brittany burns like creosote:
the spring eels swirl like blacksnakes into
the creek mouths: Father La Fave the parish priest
walks the beach in his leather coat:

the nets lay like fences: the tarring will make
them stiff like cable
the priest will bless them for the summers catch:
from the east: the wind is bad

we will walk along this watershed:
by the old beaches we must stand
watching into the sorrowing winds:

the wood is in this sand from all the old hulls
quietly they slip in among the fishheads
the spray blows above the beach like rain
we stand wetted with our remembering

the golden gulls have the heights and are gone
at the sandbars: everyspring the water gains
like dogfish the dunes lay in among the duckgrass

the fishermen's beach sleeps in the open grave
from here they watched the fat full fishing grounds

14

now no more
the fourclock mornings:
the stiff gas engines rolling beyond the bars
the water goes into the lighthouse blocks with a banging

above this beach: the sandpipers scratch
below: the sandworms

we stand: staring at the fish birds blowing
the waters beyond
the weeds string like anchor chains out of the
sandboils: the spiledriver barge lays like a broken
wall: the dead bolts hang in the holes iike worms

in the deep waters
the lampreys go driving into the trout bodies like nails

This Wisconsin Land

the fightingmen took on this country when it was
frontier: into the wilderness they came
into the fast waters
they workedout the big woods
they paid their way with beaverpelts and
then the broadaxes

the land was strong: the wild country
slashing with the trapped claws
the fightingmen marked with the clawings
the men in the big woods
piling up the bodies: the bullets: the blades
dynamite: and the smell of fires

the bigboned men
blasting down to bedrock: hammering their way

to the lakeheads
the gougings in the leadmine towns
the roadbeds pushed north: the tracks
the conquistadors in this country
staking out the land claims
breaking into the blackdirt: crossing all
the claybanks: the hands of Yugoslavs, Finns,
French: upon this land
marking this land and moving on
getting theirs and moving on

the record of their stay is in all the stumps
the burying fields are full of stones
they were here for a time: cruising timber
they knew they were not timeless

they filled their bellies and their strong boxes
they took on this country and it was full of strength
they fought it with fire

the farmfields full of glacierrock
the icesheets were into this ground like granite
the farmer staring at the broken blades
his fathers' blood is here and his sons' blood

men: the men will kill themselves in this country
the young men: more men than you can count
throwing their backs into the bucksaws
bracing themselves and lowering their heads like bulls
they will ride to their deaths on the log rafts

they will be slammed into all the riverrocks
they will lose arms: legs
they will chokeup the millponds with logs

16

the song of the shanty boy is on the wind
crying: it moves through the night like a woman

the men:
rough: and built from the groundup like pineknots
pulling double their weight: the rotgut and a prayer
the arms of the big men
hard like axles
the pikepoles and the broad axes
and the people pushing into this country
like crownfires

they built submarines for the Navy at Manitowoc
they tested them off Kewaunee in Lake Michigan
then they drifted them to the Gulf down the Mississippi

Michigan was always the oldman's lake
he worked the fish grounds off this land
he built upon this beach with his hands
behind his buildings the whitetail deer came
down to water in herds

the gill nets sprawling on the open sand in spring
tarred stiff like cable before they are hung on
the spiles
the old man walking among his sons watching the work
all the nets will be in before too many more weeks
if the good weather holds and the winds are fair

at the dinnermeal the talk is of fish: the laketrout
it will be a hard season: there are the lampreys
it is not only here: all up and down the beach
the talk is the same
again: no fisherman is safe
the laketrout fishermen will end on the beach
some of them soon: this season

17

they are operating their tugs on a shoestring
it has happened to the Eastern fishermen
on Ontario, Erie, Huron: this season they are farmers
they are beached, sold out, moved, working in cities:
the rest of the dinnermeal is eaten in silence

after the coffee and the slow cigarettes
the fisherman's sons return to their nets and
the steel drums full of creosote

the fishheads and guts bagged up in the old newspapers

the whitefish in the smoking shed:
the fishermen putting out from shore
for the potnets they cannot see

somewhere: the sun has risen
the winds from Canada kick through the fishrig
the fouroclock coffee burns in their bellies
the fishermen bunch behind the pilothouse
the tug goes fighting into the gathering blow

the knifemen: the old man staring at the scarhole in the trout

the short blade into the fish bellies
the quick slice up to the head
the gills cut loose: the guts hanging
the sharp pull
the tough hands hauling: holding
offal bunched like twisted strings
the whole works into the oil drums
the farmers behind the beach feed their hogs
on fish guts

the price is better than nothing for the fishermen
the old man looks at the sky: and down again to fan

18

his thin blade against the pocket stone

quivering: the emptied lake trout on the crushed ice
the ashes from the old man's cigarette whip into
the open belly like sand grains
in the pilot house: Rueben holds the bow on the
Two Rivers point and lights a farmer match with
his fingernail to start up his pipe

the old man will end up on the beach so very soon
there is no fighting the snakes from the sea
they will drive him high onto his own beach
they will drive him as they drove the trout before
they will kill him: the old man
as they killed the trout before

Rueben cannot look away from the old man now

the north counties: Oneida and Vilas
Eagle River and the Three Lakes village
they fought the state for the deerherd
they aimed to close their counties: the
state be damned

the whitetail deer going down the drain
the people: the scrappily people in the
northtowns: this country: the land of shotgun law
the politicians pass the laws no matter how they
put it: there must be the money involved: the
graft: the deer and the hunters from out of state
and the money and the guns

the land will be closed
there will be hell to pay in the legislature
the people will police this land

with their shotguns and their rifles
and leanmen with the sunburnt necks form
up the roadblocks
the pickup trucks parked on the sand shoulders
they sit waiting for the first deerhunters:
smoking

sitting with the shotgun
he waits for the state men
on the fringe of the big Nicolet woods
the northman smoking: awaiting the wardens
the law is bad for this land
we told all that to the legislature: they
wrote back the same old songs: the herd is
browsed out, we have buyers for the rest
the people's will and democracy
it applies to the deerherd
they signed it Sincerely
they do not take our words seriously
we think they will understand the shotguns

what the hell: we are the people too
the chain of lakes and the Three Lakes town
we told them what we wanted in spring
no deer hunting: they heard and still they
opened the season
we think that they will understand the shotguns

they have gone through the deer like dynamite
the herd: they sold it for fifty dollars a head
well: they got their price
the same thing happened to the pine
history is the same old story with different people
we don't aim to write another letter
we are the people: when we become stronger

20

we will be the law

Indian Head Country: Headwaters Country

in fall: the dogs working the cornfields
for pheasant
from the weedbeds: the yellow perch by the
pailful:
the mallard hen herds the ducklings downshore
the weasel up against the chickenwire
the old man reaches down the small rifle and
cartridges: he goes out by the backway without
a sound

the whiteness of the north country: the winter
drift: still: the traps are out for the timber
wolves

the men bringing brides to this land
the snows are deep in the fire lanes
the woman watches the thin deer from her window
the jackrabbits are hutched up in all the windfalls
the cold cracks into the big trees like rifleshots

the burnt out neighbors and all the
following weeks for the barnraising

the deerfawn in the middle of the road with
its brainpan blasted out

the crustedup carcasses in the smouldering
cowbarn: the trucks driving up into the ashes
the men loading everything up with the hooks

the lakeshore full of floating fish

perch and panfish: the bodies white and washed
out like broken bits of watercolor

the north country blowing on its fingers
in the cold mornings

the big pancakes and the porksausages
the fresh pipes: and then the Indian packs
across the portages

the spirit of Wisconsin

the long snows and the sun strong enough to
put out your eyes and the people standing with
the old shotguns

in Washington, D.C. the junior senator goes
shooting doves and crying wolves
the hunter from the land of Frank Lloyd Wright
the shotguns: are they right or wrong

after the feet of bullmoose: the fieldmice
after the spore of black bear: the black ants
after the talk of men: the old old crickets

After all: twilight into the shores of this

Ouisconsing

Twilight: and all the cryings in the wilderness

George Vukelich

LANDSCAPE

The country
of olive trees
opens and closes
like a fan.
Upon the olive grove
there is a sunken sky
and a dark rain
of cold eyes.
Rush and penumbra tremble
by the river's edge.
The gray air curls itself.
The olive trees
are full
of shouts,
A flock
of captive birds,
that move their very long
tails in the shade.

Translated by H. M. Ortiz

SOLILOQUY OF THE MOON
(from Blood Wedding
Act 3, Scene 1)

I am
Round swan in the river,
eye of cathedrals,
false dawn on the leaves;
they will not be able to escape!
Who hides? Who weeps
through the wastes of the valley?
The moon leaves a knife
abandoned in the air,

PAISAJE

El campo
de olivos
se abre y se cierra
como un abanico.
Sobre el olivar
hay un cielo hundido
y una lluvia oscura
de luceros fríos.
Tiembla junco y penumbra
a la orilla del río.
Se riza el aire gris.
Los olivos
están cargados
de gritos,
Una bandada
de pájaros cautivos,
se mueven sus larguísimas
colas en lo sombrío.

Federico García Lorca

From BODAS DE SANGRE (Act 3, Scene 1)

Cisne redondo en el río,
ojo de las catedrales,
alba fingida en las hojas
soy: ¡no podran escaparse!
¿Quién se oculta? ¿Quién solloza
por la maleza del valle?
La luna deja un cuchillo
abandonado en el aire,

which being an ambush of lead
desires to be the pain of blood.
Let me enter! I come frozen
through walls and mirrors!
To open roofs and breasts
where I may warm myself!
I'm cold! My ashes
of sleepy metals,
seek the fire's crest
through woods and streets.
But the snow carries me
upon its back of jasper;
and hindering me, hard and cold,
is the water of the dams.
Well, this night my cheeks
will have red blood
and grouped rushes
in the wide feet of the wind.
There is no shadow nor bush
that can escape!
Oh, I want to enter a breast
so I may warm myself!
A heart for me!
Hot, so it may spill
over the hills of my breast;
let me enter, oh, let me!

I do not want shade. My rays
must enter into all parts
and there will be in the dark trunks
a murmur of lights,
so that this night my cheeks
may have sweet blood,
and grouped rushes
in the wide feet of the wind.

que siendo acecho de plomo
quiere ser dolor de sangre.
¡Dejadme entrar! ¡Vengo helada
por paredes y cristales!
¡Abrir tejados y pechos
donde pueda calentarme!
¡Tengo frío! Mis cenizas
de soñolientos metales,
buscan la cresta del fuego
por los montes y las calles.
Pero me lleva la nieve
sobre su espalda de jaspe,
y me anega, dura y fría,
el agua de los estanques.
Pues esta noche tendrán
mis mejillas roja sangre,
y los juncos agrupados
en los anchos pies del aire.
¡No haya sombra ni emboscada,
que no puedan escaparse!
¡Que quiero entrar en un pecho
para poder calentarme!
¡Un corazón para mí!
¡Caliente, que se derrame
por los montes de mi pecho;
dejadme entrar, ¡ay, dejadme!

No quiero sombras. Mis rayos
han de entrar en todas partes,
y haya en los troncos oscuros
un rumor de claridades,
para que esta noche tengan
mis mejillas dulce sangre,
y los juncos agrupados
en los anchos pies del aire.

Who hides himself? Out, I say!
No! They will not escape!
I will make the horse wear
a fever of diamonds.

Translated by H. M. Ortiz

BALLYHOO FROM A DRUNK BRETON SAILOR
(an imitation from Max Jacob)

Me, me, I'm your Moses;
Come to see the Land of Roses.
The passage? Won't cost a cent:
All free, for you—Oh yeah, I meant
To tell you how I tunneled down
Below the Red Sea that time and found . . .

Me, me, I'm your Samson;
I'm the barber's patron saint.
If I'd stayed single, that damn' son
of a . . . She's my cross, but I ain't
One to complain. Griped and groused,
S'all she did, so I got soused.

Me, I'm your fine King Solomon.
For my war with Alex the Great
I put up a hundred million,
Then this Greek (he wouldn't wait!)
Had to see where I keep my bullion—
Wasn't enough left to use for bait.

Wait a minute . . . God, it's Our Lord, Christ . . .
Me! . . . It's me! . . . I saw Him twice—
My smile's as soft as the angels' blue:
Here, I'll swap with you . . .
I AM GOD! Take my advice:
I'm inviting you to Paradise.

Translated by Carroll Arnett

¿Quién se oculta? ¡Afuera digo!
¡No! ¡No podrán escaparse!
Yo haré lucir al caballo
una fiebre de diamante.

Federico García Lorca

VANTARDISES D'UN MARIN BRETON IVRE

C'est moi, c'est moi suis Moïse
Venez à la Terre promise
Rien à payer pour le passage,
venez car c'est votre avantage
Tous les tunnels de la mer Rouge
Je les percerai de ma gouge.

C'est moi, c'est moi qui suis Samson.
Je suis le patron des coiffeurs.
J'aurais bien dû rester garçon
ma femme a causé mon malheur.
Comme elle faisait la besogne
qu'avais-je à faire que l'ivrogne?

C'est moi le grand roi Salomon
Pour ma guerre avec Alexandre
j'ai fourni plus de cent millions.
Quand ce grec a voulu descendre
dans la cave où est mon pognon
l'or s'est trouvé changé en cendres.

Attendez! . . . Dieu, c'est Jésus-Christ
C'est moi! . . . c'est moi! . . . je vous le dis.
Mon sourire est doux comme un ange
avec le vôtre je l'échange.
Je suis Dieu! écoutez mon cri:
Je vous invite au Paradis.

Max Jacob

OPINION

Dream and Responsibility. By Peter Viereck. Washington, D.C.: The University Press. 65 pp. $1.50

This brief volume consists of four essays published in various periodicals during the last few years. They are bound together by their common theme of the poet's role in society, in particular his function as mediator among the crucial tensions in politics, art, and industry. It is Mr. Viereck's contention that the poet does have such a function and that his work, apart from its instrinsic merit, ultimately must be judged by its power to unify and harmonize his society.

The essay on Ezra Pound is the justly famous one published at the height of the controversy raging around the Bollingen Award to this poet. A rereading of Mr. Viereck's piece establishes it as the classical locus for the humanist opposition. Throughout the tone is one of evident restraint, supported by a most conscientious recapitulation of the arguments in favor of the award and finally an incisive, poised, riddling demolition of it by comparing the ideas of the defenders with their own actual literary practice.

At the time, it took courage for Mr. Viereck to voice his opposition so unequivocally. It was under the aegis of the venerable T.S. Eliot that the award was granted. In effect, Mr. Viereck was pressing Eliot on his own grounds of literary evaluation, for in essence the decision had been made on the assumption that a man's creative work is distinct and apart from his personal beliefs. This has been an influential idea of Eliot's since its first expression in the Twenties; it has affected in many ways the greater number of members of the Bollingen Award Committee.

Examining this theory of the separation of a man from his work, Mr. Viereck makes it stand the test of its own grounds. At the time of its enunciation, traditional cultural and religious values had disintegrated under the impact of the first World War, and in order for the individual to preserve some form of inner integrity, he was forced to separate himself from his meaningless environment and even from himself. This strategy was designed with the purpose of maintaining the minimum objective honesty one needed for one's own cultural self respect. In that case, Mr. Viereck demands in effect to know, can it be said that objective honesty or one's cultural integrity is served by offering a crown of laurel to a fascist and anti-semite? The decision of the Bollingen group marked the crescent of this kind of separatist thinking and the start of a turning away from it, with Peter Viereck one of the outstanding rebels.

The essay on Stefan George, of less immediate importance, throws light on one, perhaps the most compelling, cause for the association of political and academic figures with Hitler during his struggle for power. These men had elevated Hitler to the regions of the superhuman myth by an approximation of his rantings with the prophetic Nietzchean poetry of Stefan George. But unlike Pound, George did not associate himself with any single group for political or social ends, and the ascendancy of Hitler was the signal for George's voluntary exile from Germany, in revulsion.

The last two essays, "Art Versus Propaganda" and "The Poet in the Machine Age," though their material has been more extensively treated by others, have their point in Mr. Viereck's search for the mediative solution for the poet, whose problem is to be himself within an ordered society. Recognizing the disastrous consequences of extremes, the fatal yea saying of Hart Crane, or the inanities of Dadaism, Mr. Viereck urges the poet to make himself the focal point of the conflict and tension so that they may subsequently emerge unified and harmonized through his art. This is in sharp contrast to the dogma of the school of Pure Poetry, the New Criticism.

In theory, the New Criticism has sought the protective isolation of the poet and his sensibilities. In itself it is an excellent idea, considering the noisy, confused state of the world, but for the fact that these dedicated purists reveal in themselves an increasingly befuddled tone. As writers and critics, they find their energies and vision turned inwards, so that constitutionally they have been rendered incapable of self defense and are thus exposed with lamentable effect to the explosive issues of the day. It is through the strategy of mediation that Viereck would provide for the defense and strengthening of such a poet.

For this task, he offers the poet the resources of the Judeo-Christian ethics, essentially an appreciation of the individual in balance with his respect for an ordered society. In spite of, and more, because of the inherent weaknesses in our culture, the poet must always strive for his goal. Though he may ultimately fail, and it is more than likely that he will, by his very effort he will have created the climate in which our fundamentals may be reclaimed. The effort is everything. That is the scope and the nature of the order of our culture. That, as Viereck puts it, is the dream and the responsibility.

The formulation is strikingly analogous to that of the Nineteenth Century among the great English poets and moralists. Our problem, however, as Viereck states, is compounded by the tragedy that has gone before and that we feel is daily imminent in our lives. We must live with the awareness of the inevitability of change, whether or not it is for the best. We cannot escape it any more than the air we breathe.

But this is not Mr. Viereck's answer, and he would, by all means, including social, political, economic, and aesthetic, defend, conserve, and maintain within change the precious traditional balance between order and the individual.

The question with which I would end this review is an obvious one, arising from Viereck's position, as I see it. Granting the analogy between the moralisms of the Nineteenth Century and now, the self-evident conclusion would be to predict collapse from causes that destroyed

its forebear. But I am not so sure, since Viereck's position is infinitely more flexible in its bearing toward either side of the conflict than its predecessor's. My question concerns the ethical basis on which he grounds his hopes of unity and harmony through mediation. Nothing much has changed in respect to the contradictions suffered since the Nineteenth Century, save that today they are far more complicated by our inability to present any fixed, affirmative solution at all, in contrast to past hopes. Nor is Mr. Viereck under any such illusion, since he offers a means that will accommodate itself to the needs of either side, without, as the hope goes, commiting one exclusively to either. But this is a kind of admission that no one overarching solution exists. "But the future may lie with a literature facing both the wheels and the aspiration," Viereck says, adding, "Unless these two worlds can be united our road to hell will be paved with good intentions." He is not at all sure of the ability of Judeo-Christian ethics to do the job. But this uncertainty also forms an important part of his thesis, in which he appeals for an heroic effort from the poets.

This is quite a big order for individuals to undertake in a society at odds with itself. It would seem to expose the poet once more to his environment, without the compensation he would require, the protection by custom and tradition of his position as a poet. Viereck's formulation seems to reduce itself once more to the romantic level of the individual against society.

But the explanation for Mr. Viereck's uncertainly can be made clear. Ethics, as he would be the first to acknowledge, cannot exist without a religious insight into their need, and since he is doubtful of the effectiveness of his program, it is logical to assume that he cannot affirm, at least for the country as a whole, its religious basis.

But all this is by the way of admiring Mr. Viereck's courage and humane righteousness which he evinces so forcefully in these essays and of expressing a desire to see him develop in subsequent work the questions which he himself has had the insight to raise.

D. I.

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